

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

*Promoting the European network of independent
non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks*

The Twelfth European Union
Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference,
4-5 December 2023
Brief Conference Report
By
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The twelfth EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference (EUNPDC) was held on 4 and 5 December 2023 in a hybrid format at the Thon Hotel Brussels City Center in Brussels (Belgium). The Conference was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) on behalf of the [EU Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks](#), gathering experts on non-proliferation, disarmament, arms control and conventional weapons from public institutions, governments, international organisations, independent think tanks, and civil society. Over 400 experts (on-line and in presence) from more than 50 countries – EU members, associated states, and third countries – attended the conference in person.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference is one of the flagship events of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks. The Network was established in July 2010 by the Council of the European Union to support the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#). The Network, which also focuses on the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition](#), brings together more than 100 research entities and is coordinated by a Consortium of six institutes: La Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK - PRIF), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP).

Since 2012, the Annual Conference has been one of the key non-proliferation and disarmament meetings in the world. It has contributed to promoting strategic discussion on measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems, as well as to address challenges related to conventional weapons, including their illicit trade and the excessive

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accumulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition. The 2023 edition addressed numerous topics of central importance for the work of the EU, notably the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#), as well as several pressing arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament issues.

The participants were welcomed by Ettore Greco, Executive Vice President of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, and Sibylle Bauer, Chair of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Executive Vice President Greco started his remarks by addressing the contents and goals of the conference. He then addressed the role of the EU in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament, specifically acknowledging its role in advocating for and supporting multilateral solutions to security issues, its aim of preserving existing WMD regimes, their universalization and effective implementation, as well as the EU's role in innovating mechanisms and agreements to keep up with new challenges. He then addressed the need to consider the change in the strategic landscape, specifically in Europe, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific, stressing that a stable security environment can only emerge from a mix of deterrence postures and functional arms control agreements. He concluded his speech by saying that a top priority remains the launch of bilateral talks for the entry into force of a new strategic arms control treaty when New START expires in 2026. He noted that the likelihood of expanding strategic talks to include other nuclear powers remains very small, and that the prospect for intensifying engagement of the P-5 on nuclear risk reduction in a period of heightening tensions between nuclear powers looks promising.

Director Bauer followed by thanking the EU for its support of the Consortium, which has enabled the creation of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks. The Network includes research institutes and university departments, breaches the gap between academia and the policy-research world, and also includes a mix of technical, natural sciences, and social sciences disciplines. She continued her intervention by saying that the EUNPDC is tasked with encouraging political-security related dialogue to raise awareness of proliferation and disarmament challenges and to develop expertise and institutional capacity on these issues in think tanks and governments in Europe and beyond.

The Conference was opened by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. He stressed the fact that the paradigm of the global and European security architecture has changed drastically as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, a factor that also has an impact on non-proliferation and disarmament agreements. He continued by saying that Russia has withdrawn from multilateral arrangements, suspending the New START Treaty, withdrawing from the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, de-ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and blocking the work in non-proliferation and disarmament fora. He then pointed out that Russia is not the only challenger: the actions of Iran and North Korea augment the damage to the international system and increase polarization. Many third States around the world don't want to take sides and claim that they are trapped between narratives. However, Borrell said, for the EU it is not just a battle of narratives, but a battle of values. As a consequence, the EU is isolating Russia and fighting its disinformation campaign by reaching out to like-minded and non-aligned States, in order to join forces and work together to preserve the global multilateral framework.

The remainder of the conference was divided into four plenary sessions and six parallel sessions which discussed a variety of issues, such as the EU non-proliferation and disarmament agenda;

nuclear proliferation and disarmament challenges; chemical disarmament after the Fifth Review Conference of the CWC; outer space as a realm of conflict or cooperation; artificial intelligence and the future of warfare; diversion of conventional arms; conflict dynamics and security cooperation in East Asia; bio-technology and weaponization risks; the war in Ukraine and the future of arms control in Europe; and arms control and global power dynamics.

The Special Envoy for Non-Proliferation and Disarmament at the EEAS, Marjolijn van Deelen, stressed the fact that the current trend of competition between great powers is having a negative effect on non-proliferation and disarmament. She specifically cited the Russian withdrawal from multilateral solutions as a large part of the problem, while China represents a challenge due to its narrative on peaceful uses of dual-use technology and its attacks on the integrity of multilateral institutions. She then focused on the ways to deal with these challenges in order to safeguard and improve the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, but also the implications of the current situation for the prospects of further developing this architecture.

The Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty Organization, Robert Floyd, pointed out that it is important to acknowledge how far humanity has come vis-à-vis non-proliferation and disarmament. For instance, before 1996 there were more than 2,000 nuclear tests, while since 1996 fewer than one dozen tests have taken place. The core reason that the existing norm is so powerful is because the international community has confidence in the CTBT and thus that any test will be detected, as the CTBT International Monitoring System (IMS) can detect an explosion of less than half a kiloton anywhere on the planet. He continued by saying that over the last few years there has been a worrying shift in tone and in rhetoric and that Russia's decision to de-ratify the CTBT has come as an unwelcome surprise. He followed by stressing that the entry into force of the CTBT is now more important than ever, as this will unlock the treaty's verification tools, and then proceeded to explain the full treaty verification regime. He concluded by saying that in the event a NWS decides to proceed with a nuclear test, the global moratorium on nuclear tests would be at risk, as would the long track-record of nuclear non-proliferation.

The 2023 EUNPD Conference also featured key interventions from high-ranking officials such as Carlos Aragón Gil de la Serna, Deputy Director General for Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation; Peter M. Wagner, Director - Head of Service of Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI); Jarmo Viinanen, Chair-designate of the first session of the Preparatory Committee of the NPT Review Conference; Jacek Bylica, Chief of Cabinet at the Director General's Office, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); Stephan Klement, Special Adviser for the Iranian Nuclear Issue, European External Action Service (EEAS); Mika-Markus Leinonen, EU Representative to the International Organisations in The Hague; Marcin Wróblewski, Director of the Office of Strategy and Policy, Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Carine Claeys, Special Envoy for Space, European External Action Service (EEAS); Razvan Rusu, President of the Tenth Conference of States Parties (CSP10) to the Arms Trade Treaty; Amanda Gorely, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations and to the Conference on Disarmament; Rik Bleijs, Head of the Netherlands Biosecurity Office, National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM); Wendin D. Smith, Director of NATO's Arms Control, Disarmament, and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Nonproliferation Centre (ACDC); Malgorzata Twardowska, Deputy Director for Operations Services, CPC - Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Secretariat; Adedeji

Ebo, Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA); Bruce Turner, Permanent Representative, U.S. Delegation to the Conference on Disarmament; Guillaume Ollagnier, Director of Strategic Affairs, French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs; Rebecca Sagar, Head of the Counter Proliferation and Arms Control Center, and Deputy Director for Defence and International Security, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), along with renowned academics, researchers and government officials from around the world.

In her concluding remarks, Sibylle Bauer, Chair of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), pointed out that the world is in full crisis mode as a result of great power tensions and wars. However, worries about this scenario did not dominate the Annual Conference or other EUNPDC activities. On the contrary, the attitude that prevailed was one of great willingness to solve problems rather than lament the current situation. She followed by saying that hope and positive thinking are present among many of the participants in EUNPDC activities, allowing them to interact on a genuine human level. She is also convinced of the importance of listening to different perspectives and voices, pursuing a commitment to dig deep, think critically, get to the facts and try to navigate this mist of misinformation/disinformation, which makes education in non-proliferation and disarmament issues even more important. As a consequence, she committed the EUNPDC to continue bridging the gap between the policy world and researchers, between policy and science, between natural and social sciences and also within these sciences.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference proved, once again, to be a central event for the international discussion on the future of arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament. It also contributed to reaffirming the strong EU commitment towards a rules-based global order and showed the increased awareness of EU non-proliferation and disarmament policies among government officials, academics, and civil society representatives of third countries. Moreover, the debate explored new ways and means of improving capacities in areas of the world with limited expertise in countering the threats stemming from SALW, WMD, and their means of delivery. Finally, as every year, the Conference served as a venue to highlight the role played by European think tanks specialised in non-proliferation and disarmament and the efforts undertaken by the EU Consortium to promote and coordinate their work.

For more information and to watch the videos of the Conference, please visit the Consortium's website: www.nonproliferation.eu

